10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

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184
562
773
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legendary white python and who was released only by the sacrifice of her husband. On her release she wove the pattern of the python's skin into her skirt thus offering him the greatest insult that she knew. (This incident is related in the story of "Ku Law Lay and Naw Mu Eh".)

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Bathing is an important item of comfort in a hot country, being not so much for cleanliness as for coolness. In the hills where the water is icy cold as it comes from the mountain springs, and where often the village is located far above the water streams, bathing is not indulged in to any great extent. Nor do Karens mind dirty clothes, for they know that much washing wears them out, as they have to depend upon rubbing and pounding rather than upon soap. In the seclusion of the mountain forests they often play about in the water without clothes. On the plains, where bathing is more common either in the open rivers or at the village well, they

Karen male costume

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243 scratching the ground with a primitive wooden plow, called a "hteh." During recent years, however, iron points have been imported which make these implements more effective. If there is considerable water, he has still a third alternative, namely, to use a kind of rough harrow, named a "hto tu." (See page 88.)

Previously, and as early as possible, the cultivator has prepared a small plot in which he has sown his paddy seed. When the plants have reached about a cubit's height, they are pulled up, tied in sheaves, and carried to the water-soaked field to be set out. This work is done either by the members of the family or by women hired for the purpose. It requires about five persons to transplant an acre in a day, their compensation being approximately eight annas a day each. The process of transplanting consists merely in sticking the plants into the mud, usually by hand but sometimes with a forked stick. (See illustration on page 88.)

243 [312] After this has been completed, little remains but to regulate the quantity of water on the fields by opening or closing the small dikes enclosing the plots. Later, when the grain is in the milk, birds are often rapacious, and I have seen Karens scaring them off their fields with a kind of slingshot. With this device they throw mud balls ("naw blü tha") from which a stalk of grass trails, fluttering and whirring as it flies, to the confusion of a flock of sparrows or weaver-birds. Larger balls, moulded and dried beforehand, have a hole through the middle. The air whistles through this when the ball is in swift motion, and big flocks of birds are badly scared by it. The slingshot, with which these two sorts of missiles are cast, consists of a bamboo of four or five feet in length with a rope attached, the missile being hurled from the end of the rope. It flies with amazing swiftness and to a great distance.

In October the rainy season is at an end, the ground begins to dry, the paddy turns a golden yellow or, as the Karen say, "becomes red," and by the first of December is about ready to be reaped. If it is not already leaning over, a man walks through it with a long heavy bamboo and pushes the stalks all in one direction to an angle of about forty-five degrees, so that it will be easier to cut. (See p. 89.) With sickles like those used in the hills, the members of the family reap in the direction in which the stalks are bent and bind the grain in sheaves about a foot in diameter. The average reaper will cut one hundred and fifty sheaves a day, but the best workers have a record of two hundred and fifty. Nowadays the sheaves are usually collected on the same day they are cut, and

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No one can presume to predict the outcome of the present unsettled conditions. We can only hope that better days are in store for the cultivators, whether Burman or Karen. 435

If, before the war, a man owned his field and cattle without encumberance or other debts, he could till some twenty acres and make a comfortable living for himself and family. If, however, he was under the necessity of borrowing money and hiring men and cattle, he could hardly keep his head above water. 241 426

There are some Karens who own large fields. They may have acquired them by careful management, by purchase, or by foreclosing loans. Many of these proprietors make a business of hiring out their fields to men who cultivate them at a rental of from ten to fifteen baskets of paddy per acre, the cultivator supplying his own materials and help. In case the owner has oxen, he rents them at the usual price. In addition, he usually makes a loan of cash to his tenant, on which he gets a big return, namely, a hundred baskets of paddy for the sum of fifty rupees for six months. If the tenant borrows from a money-lender, he has to pay anywhere from fifteen to fifty percent a year for it. 241 427

On the plains the cultivator is almost entirely dependent on his single crop of paddy. If high water has washed out his first settings, there is not time enough left to raise other produce after the water has disappeared. Under these circumstances they sometimes plant sesame, but it requires only a little less time to mature than paddy. The lack of water in the dry season renders cultivation impossible without extensive irrigation. 243 312

Along the river-bottoms may be found a few plantain groves, patches of tobacco, sugar-cane, or vegetables; but these are unusual sights. They may add a little to the cultivator's income. But very few persons derive their chief support from such gardens. 249

The Karen on the plains do not observe the old religious customs of the hill people. Many times they resort to Burmese soothsayers to prognosticate the proper times for planting, reaping, and other tasks. Not a few, however, follow the old ceremonies in greater or less part. A ceremonial similar to "theh a hkü" in the hills [1] is observed on the plains where it is designated "mo a si." It is performed when the paddy is set out. Offerings are seldom seen along the paths in this region, but when the paddy has been winnowed an offering is made to "Hpi Bi Yaw" by transferring the rim of earth around a crab's burrow to the summit of the pile of 243 241 177

[1] See ante, pp. 78, 79.